



Bird Flu – What You Need to Know

What is it?

- It is an infection caused by a new influenza virus known as H5N1.
- It occurs naturally in wild birds that transmit the virus through their feces.
- It is highly contagious among birds.

Where is it?

- H5N1 originated in Southeast Asia. The World Health Organization (WHO) is monitoring bird flu and has reported that it has now spread to Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Should I be worried about catching it?

- The risk to Americans right now is extremely low.
- H5N1 passes quickly from bird to bird. It does not pass well from bird to human and almost never from human to human.
- H5N1 has not been found in birds or humans in North America.

What's the big deal?

- Very few people have been infected with avian influenza. There have been 180 reported cases of bird flu worldwide. However, over half of those infected have died.
- All reported human cases but one resulted from passage of H5N1 from birds to humans.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization are vigorously monitoring the bird flu around the world. No cases have occurred in the U.S. but **officials predict it is likely to arrive in the United States in the bird population some time this year.** It is unclear when the virus might appear in Louisville.
- Keep in mind, bird flu passes quickly from bird to bird. It does not yet pass well from bird to human or from human to human. The virus does continue to change as it spreads, and it could eventually change enough that it becomes effective at infecting humans. The virus will need to undergo many changes over time to be able to effectively infect people.

What is our city doing to prepare?

We are preparing for avian influenza in Louisville in multiple different areas:

Surveillance

- The Louisville Metro Health Department in conjunction with the State of Kentucky Department of Health is developing plans to make a rapid PCR test that can detect H5N1 virus available for animal and human testing in Louisville within the next year.

Communication

- Our close relationship with the Jefferson County Medical Society and the State of Kentucky's Health Alert Network will allow for rapid communication of vital information to local medical providers and our public health partners throughout the state.
- We are working with local hospitals to develop plans to assure that our medical resources will be used effectively in the event of a pandemic

Providing vaccine

- It will likely be at least three years before an effective avian influenza vaccine is available for worldwide use. Our responsibility during that time is to develop an effective plan for vaccinating the population of Louisville. Our Emergency Preparedness division is working with multiple community groups, including the local EMA, the University of Louisville, Louisville's Medical Reserve Corps, and local law enforcement agencies to develop plans to provide vaccine efficiently to the citizens of our community.

Louisville Influenza Pandemic Summit

- The Louisville Metro Health Department is taking the lead in preparing for a pandemic by hosting the Louisville Influenza Pandemic Summit to be held on May 8, 2006. This summit will bring together local government leaders, public health personnel, business entities, law enforcement personnel, community medical providers, and other community groups to discuss the threats that a pandemic will pose. We will address not only specific medical issues associated with a pandemic, but also the potential for disruptions in the workplace and basic community services.

[Click here for more information on the May 8 Louisville Pandemic Flu Summit](#)

How can I protect myself?

- If you travel to a country that has reported cases of bird flu, avoid contact with poultry and feces from poultry.
- Other than that you always help to protect yourself from any disease when you use good preventive health practices such as:
 - covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
 - washing your hands thoroughly and often
 - avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth
 - stay home when you are sick
 - getting a flu shot or other immunizations as suggested or required

- visit www.cdc.gov/germstopper for more information

Do I need to be stockpiling food and other supplies?

- With the worldwide surveillance measures already in place, we are likely to have a warning period of several months before an influenza pandemic comes to Louisville.
- However, it is always reasonable to have an emergency supply kit at home or in your car. The kit should include water, food and other vital supplies. For suggestions on personal preparedness and what to include in a disaster emergency kit go to www.bt.cdc.gov/planning/#personal.
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What are the bird flu symptoms?

Initial bird flu symptoms look no different than the common cold. They consist of:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches

Eventual severe pulmonary disease is the hallmark of human avian influenza disease.

What's the treatment?

- The antiviral medication tamiflu seems to help people infected with avian influenza. However, using preventive measures to reduce the risk of getting infected is the best therapy.

Where can I get more information?

- U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>
- World Health Organization http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/index.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/qa.htm#1>